

I Ain't Never Gonna Need This...

Contextual Teaching in the Classroom Through the Use of Printed Media

By

Scott Barkley

Research

When hearing the words “Language Arts”, the same pictures jump into the minds of students. To them it equals sitting in a desk, copying definitions from a dictionary, and reading stories that, for some unexplained reason, have been deemed classics and now must be learned by every living soul on the planet. In other words, the same tactics used thirty years ago are used today to a vastly different audience. In the past decade, social institutions have changed dramatically. Adults are reminded of how old they are getting with each new “I Love the (fill in your decade here)” special by VH-1. This is a new day and a new crowd to which we are trying to communicate. *The Jeffersons* are now *The Osbornes*. *That's Incredible* is now *Jackass*.

“Children with all backgrounds bring with them to school extensive involvement in literacy_” (Zemelman et al.58). In all English classrooms, there are the students who have no interest whatsoever in reading or writing the assigned material. However, there is *something* to which they do have an interest, and this particular something has a written piece on it somewhere. The hobbies of the people in our classes are as varied as the people occupying the desks. It is imperative to find avenues which tap into these numerous areas represented by our students.

Students who are involved in the topic actively will work harder on being sure the final piece is of high quality. They care about the topic, therefore they care about the end product. This also results in ownership of the product by the student. In the end, they are assessors of it just as much as the teacher. This doesn't mean that the teacher completely fades into the background. Instead, they are instructing on how students may improve their work. “Good teaching means helping students learn these true authoring processes” (Zemelman et al 60).

In no way are literary classics to be abandoned in this process. The study of books, journals, essays, and the like can still be appreciated by today's student. The only difference is that now teens will understand how the ability to write and communicate on several different levels to the reader may be just as useful in a sports magazine as it is in *Great Expectations*.

The purpose of education is to enrich the individual and give that person the desire to learn later in life when their motivation is wanting to know, and not to keep from getting a bad grade and therefore lose car key privileges. The passion for learning is the goal. Without it, there are people who might be pretty good at following orders and not much else. Educators are to provide a model for learning that will stick to the student, for “knowledge that is simply poured into the human mind, that in no way modifies behavior or creates a reaction or causes an expression, is likely knowledge gone to waste” (Parnell 14).

National Standards/QCCs

Standard 1: Students read poems, short stories, essays, novels, magazines, newspapers, charts, graphs, and technical documents for pleasure and self-improvement.

Standard 9: Students acquire new vocabulary through reading and listening while demonstrating progress through speaking and writing.

Standard 15: Students write in Standard English sentences with correct grammar and mechanics.

Standard 18: Students participate in the writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading, and publishing.

Standard 24: Students work as team members to solve problems.

Standard 25: Students compose and revise on a computer.

Overview of Assignment

Students will be placed in various groups and put together a newspaper featuring a topic of their choice. Groups will not exceed more than five people. Each newspaper will be divided into different sections so students will receive a variety of experiences which will cover several areas of the curriculum.

Within each newspaper, there will be one editor and several writers. Students are to determine who will handle a particular “beat” and write according to their interest – whether it be sports, entertainment, or news. The group works together in producing the layout of the product, but the editor has the final say in production.

Materials

Day 1

Objective: Students will be placed into groups and brainstorm concepts for putting together an original magazine or newspaper.

Groups are formed. Positions are arranged among the group members before students engage in a brainstorming session on the topic areas of their magazine.

Day 2

Objective: Students will begin gathering information on their specific area of the magazine. This may be done during school, but mostly will be completed during the afternoon and evening hours.

Day 3

Objective: Writers will present the first draft of their stories to other members of the group as well as their editor. Corrections are made to produce the second draft.

Day 4

Objective: Editors will make final suggestions on lengthening/tightening stories. Layout is finalized.

Day 5

Students make final drafts and editing to stories. In the computer lab, stories are typed up and ready to be sent off to print.

Assessment

A money system will be used to determine a portion of the grade for the project. At this point, groups from other classes will be given twenty fake dollars for investing in advertising to be placed in the separate newspapers. The newspapers which are more attractive to the investing groups will end up with more money. Groups may invest no more than ten dollars with any one newspaper/magazine. This will account for 50% of the grade. The other 50% will be determined by the teacher according to the following rubric.

Written Material	1	2	3	4	5
Creativity	1	2	3	4	5
Arrangement of Copy	1	2	3	4	5
Professionalism	1	2	3	4	5

Bibliography

Daniels, Harvey, Arthur Hyde, and Steven Zemelman. *Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heineman. 1998

Parnell, Dale. *Why Do I Have to Learn This?*. Waco, TX. Cord. 1995.